

Union officials prepare ground for sellout of locked-out Cooper Tire workers

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Hundreds of Cooper Tire workers attended a local union meeting in Findlay, Ohio Saturday as the lockout of 1,050 workers entered its twelfth week.

Negotiations between the company and United Steelworkers (USW) Local 207L, scheduled to resume the previous Monday, broke down after one day. Management maintained its intransigent line on concessions demands following the ratification of a separate contract by workers at its Texarkana, Arkansas plant following negotiations with the USW.

The national union leadership went out of its way to reach a settlement with Cooper at the Arkansas plant in order to isolate the Findlay workers and create the conditions for the imposition of the company's demands, including a 5-tier wage system.

Steelworkers officials used the local union meeting in Findlay to give the impression that nothing could be done to shift the company, hoping thereby to prepare the way for a sellout of the workers' struggle.

Two USW International officials spoke at the meeting. They claimed that the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) suit brought by the USW was having an impact on the company and giving the union "leverage" in negotiations. This is a lie designed to encourage illusions that appeals to the government or Democratic politicians will force the company to back down. Meanwhile, strikebreakers operate freely in the plant and the union does nothing to mobilize working class support to halt the scabbing and stop production.

A worker reported that Local 207L President Rodney Nelson told the meeting that the union was having "informal talks" with management and the company was near to presenting a proposal approaching the Texarkana deal, with a signing bonus and a buyout offer of \$1,000 for every year of service.

The Findlay workers were offered a signing bonus

with the offer they rejected in November, but were united in their opposition to more concessions. Any buyout offer that Cooper presented would be for the purpose of forcing out older workers and replacing them with younger workers at a lower wage rate.

Nelson sought to soften up the workers for a sellout by saying they were not going to get all the things they were fighting for. They would have to make "tough decisions" soon and "eat some things."

Jim, with 22 years at Cooper, told the *World Socialist Web Site*, "It didn't look good at the meeting. The International and local union officers were beginning to backtrack. One guy from the International was fired up, but most of the officers didn't look at us. They gave short answers to questions with their heads down.

"One guy asked if the company still wanted to take retirement benefits from the new-hires. When the union officer said they told the company to shove that, workers cheered. They still want to fight.

"We've been out for two months but the International officers are making good money.

"It's all in the company's hands. From the beginning, they wanted to move production to China and then they bought a plant in Serbia. The companies want to turn the clock backwards, like the days when my father-in-law, who was a coal miner in Kentucky, was paid in script and still owed money to the company store."

Rick told the WSW, "The International took over the negotiations in Texarkana and they are doing the same thing here."

An older worker said, "The corporations don't want to pay retirement benefits. How inconsiderate it is of us to live longer these days! I've worked at Cooper Tire for 42 years and I'm feeling every minute of it.

"Management is purposely destroying this company.

It's like they are taking an airplane and sending it into a nosedive. They want to squeeze out as much profit as possible and take it out of my pocket. They want us to starve to death. I don't want to be a millionaire—I only want to earn enough to have heirs.

“I'm not against socialism if everybody gets what they need. We should have a chicken in every pot and not have to work our lives away.”

Another worker with 19 years said, “If we accept the bone they are offering it would have been ten weeks of sacrifice for nothing. It's going back to the Great Depression, when people were fighting over jobs. These scabs are only looking for work—but they are taking it from us.

“The working class has to build a movement. If we quit this job and go back to school, you'll come out of college with tens of thousands of dollars in debt and still not be able to find a job. There's an uprising coming. It's going to be a revolution.”

Workers remain defiant despite the company's intransigence and the treachery of the union. Medical insurance has been cut off by the company since the beginning of February. The local has offered to cover health expenses of locked-out workers, but details are unclear.

A notice on the USW Local 207L web site says: “Bill for Health Insurance: If you received a bill for your health insurance from Cooper Tire, it would be highly beneficial for you to pay this bill.”



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